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Air-Resupply Supervisor To Testify on Contra Role



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The Iran-contra hearings resume today on Capitol Hill with testimony from Robert C. Dutton, a retired Air Force colonel who played a central role in supervising the air-resupply operation set up for the Nicaraguan contras by retired Air Force major general Richard V. Secord.

Senate and House select committee sources said yesterday that, in addition to Dutton, they hope to hear testimony this week from former CIA operative Felix Rodriguez, former U.S. ambassador to Costa Rica Lewis Tambs and, if time permits, Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams. The former Central Intelligence Agency station chief in Costa Rica, who uses the pseudonym Tomas Castillo, may testify in executive session. Sources said that as much of Castillo's testimony as possible will be subsequently released.

This week's scheduled appearance by businessman Albert A. Hakim was postponed until next week to permit investigators to follow leads resulting from interviews with Hakim last weekend, sources said. Hakim, Secord's business partner, managed the finances for the Secord enterprise that financed a private U.S. airlift to the contras last year.

Today's witness, Dutton, joined Secord's firm, Stanford Technology Trading Group International Inc., in May 1986, shortly after retiring from the Air Force. He was placed in charge of straightening out the problem-plagued resupply unit, which was based in El Salvador.

The operation was exposed last October when a plane was shot down over Nicaragua, leading to the capture of cargo handler Eugene Hasenfus.

Dutton has known Secord for many years; Secord called him "my man" in his testimony to the congressional panels. He worked under Secord in Iran in the mid-1970s when the general headed the U.S. Air Force unit there.

Dutton, who has a background in unconventional warfare, also was involved in the secret White House arms sales to Iran and helped Secord debrief released hostage David P. Jacobsen in Beirut, according to a report by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

Dutton is likely to be questioned about his contact with aides to Vice President Bush on the contra-resupply operation. Dutton accompanied Rodriguez, who assisted the resupply operation, to the office of Col. Samuel J. Watson, Bush's deputy national security adviser, last June 25. According to Bush's office, Dutton waited outside and did not take part in the discussion.

Dutton also wrote a paper outlining the total worth of the air-resupply operation at a time that Secord and Lt. Col. Oliver L. North, then a member of the National Security Council's staff, were trying to persuade the CIA to absorb it. Some members of the committees investigating the Iran-contra affair have seized on this paper as evidence that Secord was trying to make a profit, which Secord denies.

*Staff writer Dan Morgan
contributed to this report.*